

OUR VIEW

Special elections need tweaking

We have a real gem in Carlton County Auditor Paul Gassert. As an elected official, Gassert shows his dedication to the public in many ways.

So we don't assign any blame to the auditor for the mail-in ballot debacle in this past special election cycle.

Gassert opened his office last Saturday before the election and kept his office open late on election day to accommodate voters, especially voters who typically mail in their ballots. That's required by Minnesota law.

But the law also allocates just 35 days between the Governor's call for a special election and the actual election day. There's simply not enough time for mail-in ballots to be prepared, mailed to voters, and returned to the auditor's office for tabulating with all the ballots they receive from regular polling places.

That law needs to be changed. Mail-in ballots are a great idea, in some ways, because staffing polls in low-voter rural areas is expensive. But it's an absolute disgrace that more than 400 voters were disenfranchised from exercising their most basic civil right — voting — in the primary special election for State Senate District 11. At least that many mail-in voters did not receive their

ballots in time to get them mailed back to the auditor's office to be counted.

Between changes with the Postal Service that route mail through the Twin Cities after the Duluth sorting facility was closed, to the extreme weather (which further delayed the mail) and a federal holiday the day before the primary, we need to fix the special election laws.

One suggestion is a simple: perhaps the county auditor's office could sort and deliver the mail-in ballots to each local post office, which then can deliver those ballots the next day. Similarly, each local post office can gather the ballots received by election day and the auditor could arrange for someone to pick them up. There is a cost to pay a driver for drop-off and pick-up, but it's still less expensive than staffing a polling place.

With the dedication of public servants like those in Gassert's office, some tweaks to the election law, and a little creative thinking, we hope no future election will leave so many voters unheard and votes uncounted.

We welcome your input to the Pine Knot News community newspaper. Send your thoughts, letters, or news to opinion@PineKnotNews.com.

Write a letter to the editor

We love to get your letters, but there are a few guidelines that must be followed.

All letters to the editor should be typed or clearly handwritten and include the writer's name, address and phone number, for verification if needed. Only the writer's name and city will be used with the letter.

We reserve the right to edit the letter for style, space and civility, and to refuse publication of let-

ters deemed libelous, slanderous or otherwise inappropriate.

No writer will be published more than once every 30 days.

Letters should be 300 words or under, unless otherwise specified.

Mail or bring to:

Pine Knot News: 122 Ave. C, Cloquet MN 55720

Email:

Letters may also be emailed to: opinion@pineknotnews.com

Pine Knot

News

Volume 2, Issue 6

Pete Radosevich, *Publisher* - Pete.Radosevich@PineKnotNews.com

Jana Peterson, *Editor* - Jana.Peterson@PineKnotNews.com

Rose Chu, *Business manager* - Rose.Chu@PineKnotNews.com

Debbie Zime, *Production manager* - Production@PineKnotNews.com

Ivan Hohnstadt, *Advertising manager* - Ads@PineKnotNews.com

Pine Knot News is published weekly every Friday by Pine Knot, LLC
122 Avenue C
Cloquet MN 55720.

Business, editorial, accounting and circulation offices are located at 122 Avenue C, Cloquet MN 55720.

Email news tips to News@PineKnotNews.com

Call 218-878-9332 to subscribe, stop by the office or go online to www.pineknotnews.com.

Application to mail at periodical rates is pending at Cloquet, Minn.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Pine Knot News, 122 Avenue C, Cloquet MN 55720.

'The kids are alright'

The pickup truck was stuck, nose-deep in the snowy ditch.

In Brainerd for the weekend, I was exploring a bit as 4-year-old Eleanor napped in the back seat. Rushing her brothers to and from the swim meet and accommodating my wife, Tara, as she volunteered at the event, meant that Ellie didn't get her nap. She fell asleep as I dropped off her brother Tommy and I knew if I woke her up, she'd stay awake and be very cranky by dinner time.

So I drove.

I headed up Minnesota Highway 371 toward Nisswa, a tiny town where State Senate majority leader Paul Gazelka resides. From there, after a quick spin through town — Ellie still sleeping soundly — and with some pretty good oldies on the radio, I headed northwest towards Pequot Lakes. My neighbors Brian and Megan Kazmierczak came from there, and I had never seen it.

After driving past snow-covered mini-golf, iced-over outdoor water slides, and lots of self-storage places, it was time to turn around and head back. Ellie was still sound asleep as I turned left onto Meyers Road off the highway. While the road looked like major intersection, once I got away from the highway it quickly turned into an icy two-lane road for access to the rural homes and cabins. A quarter-mile in, it veers left sharply and, as I turned the corner, there was that pickup truck in the ditch.

It was deep, all right. The tailgate was high in the air, like a sinking Titanic, and one of the rear wheels was spinning freely in midair. The other tire had obviously been spinning, too, as a trail of dirt and snow spilled into the middle of the road. Another pickup was on the road, with a tow rope attached. It looked like they had been trying to pull the truck out of the ditch. They had not been successful.

Three young men were standing in the road when I approached. One got into his truck, the unstuck one on the road, and moved it slightly to allow me to pass. I slowed way down, because that's what you do when you encounter people standing on a rural road with one of their vehicles in the ditch.

As I approached, I rolled down my window.



Harry's Gang

Pete Radosevich

"Need the help of my Honda minivan?" I called out to them. They laughed, fortunately, and declined my offer. They seemed to be in high spirits. After I suggested I could tie a rope around my hitch and stabilize the truck

on the road, maybe giving it enough traction to pull their friend's truck out of the ditch, they looked at each other, and one of them said, "Sure. Let's give it a try."

The whole scene took about 15 minutes. The boys, I'd guess high school seniors, were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Apparently, Clayton slid off the road and called his buddies Josh and Caleb (?) — I'm not sure; it turns out teenagers still mumble — to come rescue him. All three wore sensible outdoor gear: Carhartts, thick gloves, boots. I think at least two of the three had a bit of snooze, although they kept it hidden from me. I heard quite a few friendly jabs between the three and more than one "Ford" joke.

It's a surprisingly pleasant way to spend a late Sunday afternoon. Even with a truck stuck deep in a snowbank, these kids were carefree. They politely included me in their adventure, a middle-aged stranger with a sleeping child in his backseat, as they took charge of their predicament, directing me where to place my van and attaching the second tow rope to my minivan as if I were part of the team, which I guess I was, if only for a quarter-hour.

And the spirit of three young men, enjoying their camaraderie, sharing their adventure with a stranger, infected me with a sense of contentment — if this is what the youth of today are like, we're all going to be all right.

As I later turned around to leave, the boys approached my window. The driver of the rescue truck pulled his glove off and extended his hand to me. "Thanks for your help, Sir," he said, solemnly. I told them all to make sure their next vehicle had front-wheel drive and drove away. Ellie stayed asleep until we pulled up to the swim meet, unaware of the great adventure we had just had.

Pete Radosevich is the publisher of the Pine Knot News community newspaper and an attorney in Esko who hosts the talk show Harry's Gang on CAT-7. Contact him at Pete.Radosevich@PineKnotNews.com.

LETTER to the editor

Tunnel vision

To the editor:

As though looking through a tunnel, the Wrenshall School Board is once again planning to run another school improvement/repair facility referendum this year, despite the overwhelming known risks facing property taxpayers in the school district.

There is little doubt that something needs to be done to fix and repair the school. And this is exactly where the school board and concerned property taxpayers disagree on what should be done and at what cost. Those that want to proceed more conservatively and weigh the risks toward any practical solution are completely ignored.

In the previous two school years, open enrollment was about a third of the school's student enrollment; this year it is just short of 50 percent. Consider also that about a third of all Wrenshall school district students open-enroll in other

schools.

The school board states that the open enrollment numbers are needed to sustain the school. It's true that state aid follows open-enrolled students to our district, but levy funding for school improvement/repair or operating costs do not. That additional burden falls on local property taxpayers.

Consider also the energy/utility tax settlements that will create a major tax burden on property owners, and the current facility referendum balance of \$1.3 million due to be paid in full by 2022.

Can we afford to sustain a school at all? Our population is small, and our property tax base is small, and so why does the school board recommend we build/improve and invest in a larger school?

The school board needs to focus on what's in the best interest of property taxpayers.

Michael Rabideaux, Wrenshall

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

City of Cloquet

Mayor Roger Maki

218-879-4976, rmaki@cloquetmn.gov

Ward 1 Councilor Warren "Bun" Carlson

218-206-1715, wcarlson@cloquetmn.gov

Ward 2 Councilor Sheila Lamb

218-590-5308, slamb@cloquetmn.gov

Ward 3 Councilor Dakota Koski

218-461-8444, dkoski@cloquetmn.gov

Ward 4 Councilor Kerry Kolodge

218-481-3862, KKolodge@cloquetmn.gov

Ward 5 Councilor Steve Langley

218-879-1492, SLangley@cloquetmn.gov

At-Large Councilor Lara Wilkinson

218-260-5083, LWilkinson@cloquetmn.gov